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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 002044

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2007

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A TRIP TO IBADAN IN OYO STATE

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ROBYN HINSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AN

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1. (C) Summary. A trip to Ibadan in Oyo State shows residents of the southwest are already revving up for the elections in 2003. Dr. Omulolu Olunloyo, who was governor of Oyo State more than a decade ago, has decided to come out of semi-retirement to run again for that office "for the good of the nation." Dr. Anthony Marinho, medical doctor and community activist, wants to run his successful citizenship program to prepare voters for the upcoming elections. End summary.

Blast from the past - Olunloyo wants to be governor again

2. (U) On a recent trip to Ibadan to make introductory calls on local politicians and NGOs, PolOffs met with Dr. (Chief) Omololu Olunloyo, former Governor of Oyo State (1983). Olunloyo was warm and welcoming, but said that he did not grant interviews or meetings these days to "just anybody." He said he wanted Nigeria's friends to remember that Nigeria is the most populous and important country in sub-Saharan Africa and that it has a history of credibility in the international community. However, the country is at a crossroads in its journey towards democracy and a stable economy, so Olunloyo has decided to run for Governor because "things are at such a bad pass in Nigeria someone needs to step forward and show the people how things should be done." Although he heads a highly successful civil engineering firm, Olunloyo has sought or accepted positions in government at various times over the past thirty years. His last foray into politics was in 1992 when he was proposed as a possible vice president for the Socialist Democratic Party presidential candidate, the late Major General Shehu Yar'adua. (Comment. The elections in 1992 were nullified and the late military ruler, Sani Abacha, was installed as leader. Yar'adua, was imprisoned in 1995 for pushing Abacha to step down and allow a return to civilian government by 1996. Yar'adua died in prison in 1997. End comment.)

3. (U) While strolling through his small English garden (geese on the lawn and yew hedges), Olunloyo expounded on the problems facing Nigeria and what he thought could be done to solve them. "I should be able to retire now, pass the baton to someone else and watch the political race from the sidelines," he mused. However, Nigeria, despite billions in oil revenue and a return to a civilian government after sixteen years of military rule, "hadn't really gotten anywhere." Olunloyo believes that to make progress Nigeria needs first, a majority of the people willing to sacrifice to improve and advance as a nation, and, second, a government that has the ability to meet the needs of the people. He said that one of his goals, should he be elected, would be to work to get international assistance of every kind, "to make Nigeria a better place for all its citizens. There is no need to waste time re-inventing the wheel." Nigerians must learn from other modern nations, not just the U.S. and Britain. He pointed to the nations of Asia and Europe that recovered from the devastation of World War II to become global competitors.

4. (U) Back in his book-filled office, Olunloyo expressed his ideas on the political scene, saying that many in the current government, especially at the local and State level, were "risen from poverty and are the first in their families or groups to be successful." He proposed that what Nigeria needs is to draw its leaders from the pool of highly educated, professional and experienced Nigerians both in-country and abroad. On the economy, Olunloyo agreed with most modern economists that Nigeria could not continue to rely on its one highly profitable but depletable resource--oil. However, he found economic opportunity in areas rejected as too long-term to be helpful by several Nigerians we have talked to. Olunloyo says Nigeria has a

wealth of historical resources to depend on other than oil. He mentioned agriculture, food crop production, food processing, textiles, and herbal medicines. He hinted that he had information that the Nigerian Institute for the Study of Herbal Medicines was close to an herbal treatment for HIV/AIDS. He concluded, saying "I am optimistic that the remedy for Nigeria's problems is in our own hands, and with help from our friends in the international community, we will realize our greatness."

Gynecologist with a broad view

15. (U) The trip across the city of Ibadan to meet with Dr. Anthony Marinho says much about the state of the infrastructure in southern Nigeria. The road to Ibadan is the main road north from the port of Lagos and is a major trucking route. For much of the distance between the two cities the road is well-maintained, and though traffic is heavy with trucks and private vehicles, it moves at highway speeds. Entering the city, traffic on this route (which becomes the main street through the city) snarls and comes to a complete standstill due to the road's condition. On the way to the meeting PolOffs were held for an hour while traffic eased around a large truck that had capsized navigating past an axle-deep pothole that stretched across the width of the road. (Comment. The evening before on the way to dinner on the same road, driving was made even more challenging by the lack of working street lights anywhere in the city. One is warned to take pothole-evasion action when the taillights of the vehicle in front disappear. End comment.) Nonetheless, we arrived for our meeting only a few minutes late.

16. (U) Dr. Marinho is a Nigeria-trained and practicing obstetrician and gynecologist. He is more well-known in the southwest, however, as a community activist and founder of Educare Trust. Educare is an NGO started in 1994 stating its purposes were "to improve education at all levels for our girls and boys..., to promote civic education, democracy and good governance in the belief that these are fundamental to sustainable development..., and to emphasize the development of morals and avoidance of social vices such as smoking, AIDS and drugs." The headquarters are located on one floor of a small, well-maintained office building, and are equipped with computers and other usual office machines. Educare has developed literature, seminars and workshops that cover subjects from AIDS to voter registration. At the headquarters, Educare offers young people basic computer training, career guidance, and special tutoring. There is also a tiny library geared to the secondary school student. Of particular interest to PolOffs was the citizenship/voter education program that Educare had developed with USAID funding for the 1999 elections. According to Marinho, this program was very successful at the time and a similar program was needed for the upcoming elections. Marinho said that the most important element was to encourage all voters to register, especially those citizens who had either not registered in the last elections or those who had come of voting age since the 1999 elections.

17. (C) Comment. Olunloyo is a member of President Obasanjo's party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and served with Yar'adua in Obasanjo's first administration in 1989. He told us he has set his sights on the "small job" of being governor of Oyo State, and he studiously avoided comment on Obasanjo's current administration or the impeachment attempt. It is still early in the run-up to elections and Olunloyo's candidacy appears to be a cat's paw to tease the entrenched Alliance for Democracy (AD) party that currently controls the southwest by showing it that the PDP can field a credible candidate. Whether Olunloyo will stay in the race appears doubtful. Marinho is apolitical, but well-respected, well-known, and influential in the southwest. Although he claims no party affiliation, he has shown that his organizations and associates are effective at encouraging youth to participate in good government. He continues to receive funding and donations from private industry here and from the international community and charitable foundations. He may be a significant factor in the upcoming elections in energizing the youth vote and in voter registration in Oyo State.

HINSON-JONES